

# Couple opened hearts to four sisters

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They also adopted a girl  
from Romania

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ADA TO ZEELAND B3  
DEATHS B4

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ALLEGAN COUNTY — The previous few years had been anything but stable for the four young sisters.

They lived in a car, bounced from place to place, enduring abuse and neglect they might have thought normal. Then, they were taken from their mother and split into two foster care homes.

And then one day, Allegan County residents Rudy and Lisa Pou peered through a mirror as the quartet played together in an office at Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. Someone's heart melted.

"Up to that point, I wasn't sure," Rudy Pou recalled of the couple's debate over adopting all four. "Then I thought, 'We can't let them be separated.'"

That was two years ago. Today, Shayla, 8, Monique, 7, Breyala, 5, and Alisia, 4, share a rambling home and 10 acres with the Pous.

Stable? Yes. Serene — perhaps not.

Their hectic farm household includes eight horses, one miniature horse, one dog, 10 cats — not to mention the Pous' first adopted daughter, Clautia, 11, a native of Romania whom they brought into their home in 1999.

Lisa Pou, 38, describes their family this way: "Joy, pure joy. Beyond all the stress and them driving me crazy, they make me very happy. They are very sweet girls."

Jill Carey, a social worker for Lutheran Adoption Service, said it's vital for siblings to share a home as they grow up.

"Research says that one of the biggest issues for adoptees is they really miss that sibling connection," Carey said.

Carey said the point is especially worth remembering during November's National Adoption Month, an observance which calls attention to the chronic need for adoptive parents.

The Pous never set out to become such a large and busy family.

According to Lisa Pou, it began with a much simpler goal: Adopt one child.

"I've always wanted to adopt," she explained. "We just kind of decided to go that route."

They learned about an impoverished girl named Clautia in Romania, whose mother gave her up when she could not properly provide for her.



PRESS PHOTO/ANNA MOORE BUTZNER

**Family photo:** From right are Clautia, 11; Alisia, 4; Monique, 7; Shayla, 8; Breyala, 5, and their parents, Lisa and Rudy.

She came to them at age 5, speaking no English and terrified at her abrupt transition.

But after a rough start, she took to their country place like a natural.

The day they brought her home from the airport, Lisa recalled, "She screamed all the way home. She was hysterical. She wouldn't let go of the door handle."

Now, she says, "She is probably the best daughter you could ask for."

Clautia is fluent in English. Tall for her age, she beams with pride when she rides show horses in 4-H events, loves basketball, even helps out around the house.

But somewhere along the way, the Pous wondered: Wouldn't it be nice if she had an adoptive brother or sister?

Lisa Pou learned first about the

four sisters. She thought perhaps — perhaps — Rudy could be persuaded to think just a little bit bigger. By then, the girls had been split into two foster-care homes.

Rudy, 47, admitted the prospect was just a bit daunting. He was still teetering with indecision until the day he saw the four girls behind the glass.

Lisa Pou recalled they went back to the car to talk about it. It was a short discussion.

"It was right then and there. We decided, 'We're going to do it.'"

Despite their different backgrounds, she said the five girls are now family. They have their spats, like any sisters. But there are plenty of hugs and giggles to compensate.

"They play together constantly," Lisa said. "They are sisters."